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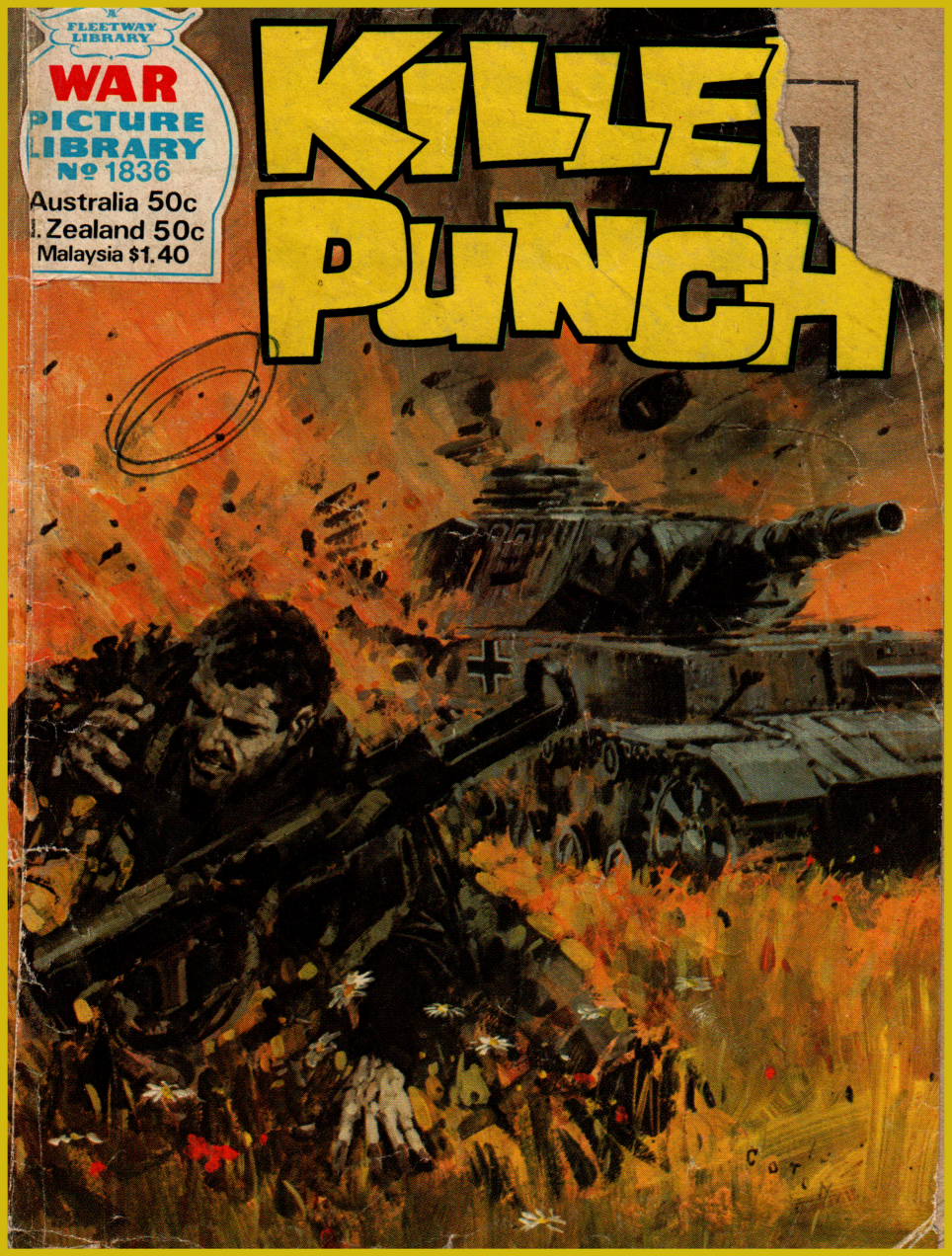
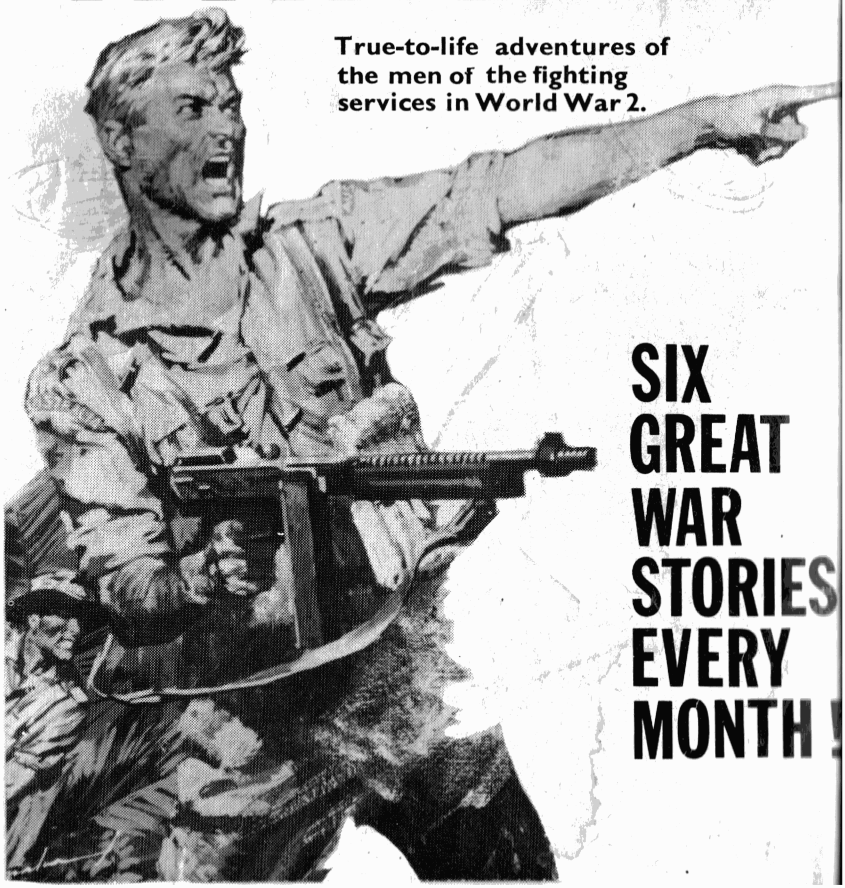
KILLER PUNCH



war thrills . . action . . drama

WAR PICTURE LIBRARY

True-to-life adventures of the men of the fighting services in World War 2.



SIX GREAT WAR STORIES EVERY MONTH !

KILLER PUNCH

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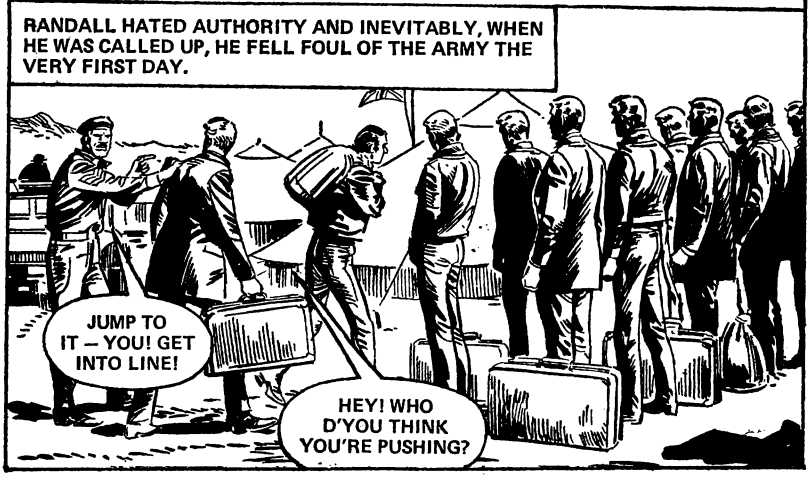
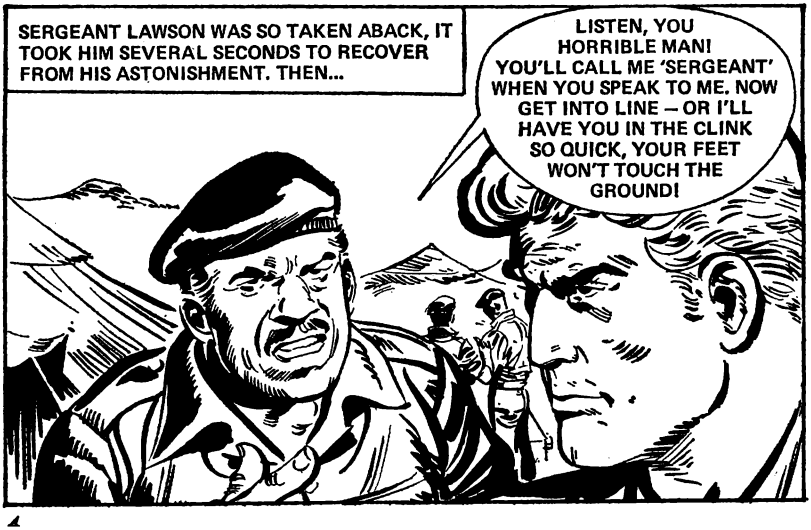
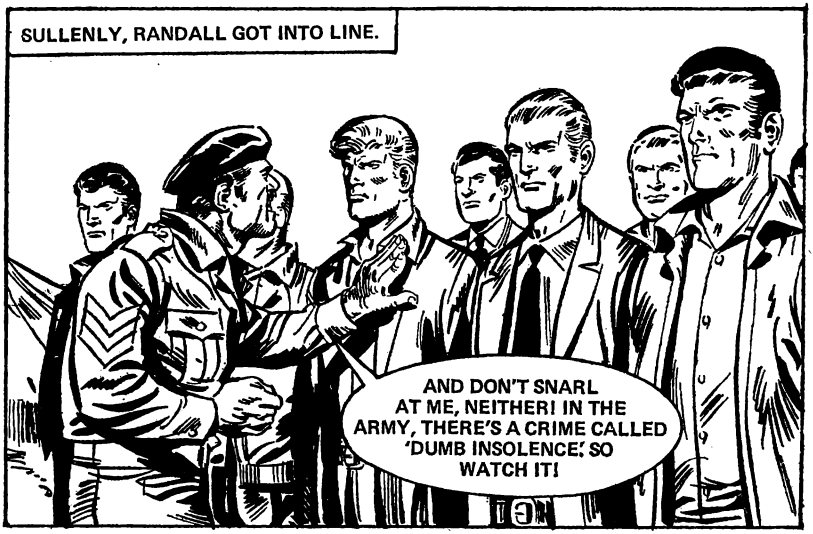
W.P. 1836

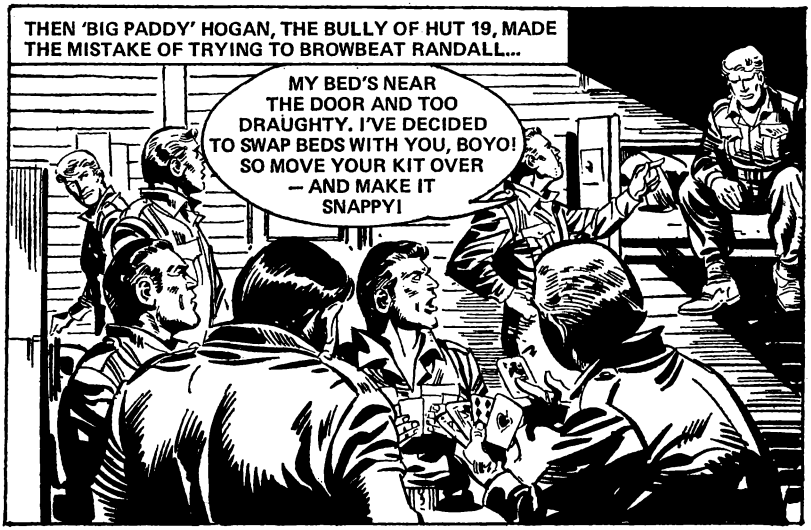
Chapter I. The Threat






SULLENLY, RANDALL GOT INTO LINE.
AND DON'T SNARL AT ME, NEITHER! IN THE ARMY, THERE'S A CRIME CALLED 'DUMB INSOLENCE.' SO WATCH IT!

FROM THE VERY FIRST, MIKE RANDALL BITTERLY RESENTED HAVING TO OBEY THE ORDERS OF MEN LIKE SERGEANT LAWSON, WHO WAS ALWAYS PICKING ON HIM...
STRAIGHTEN UP, RANDALL! PUT SOME SNAP INTO IT, MAN! TRY AND LOOK LIKE A SOLDIER, EVEN IF YOU AREN'T ONE!


THEN 'BIG PADDY' HOGAN, THE BULLY OF HUT 19, MADE THE MISTAKE OF TRYING TO BROWBEAT RANDALL...
MY BED'S NEAR THE DOOR AND TOO DRAUGHTY. I'VE DECIDED TO SWAP BEDS WITH YOU, BOYO! SO MOVE YOUR KIT OVER – AND MAKE IT SNAPPY!

MIKE GOT UP AS THOUGH HE WAS GOING TO OBEY – AND THEN...
OUGH!

AFTER FINISHING HIS BASIC TRAINING, MIKE RANDALL WAS PUT ON A DRAFT TO JOIN THE SOUTH HANTS REGIMENT. HE GRINNED TRIUMPHANTLY AT SERGEANT LAWSON...

THERE'S ONE GOOD THING ABOUT IT, SERGEANT. I'LL HAVE YOU OFF MY BACK AT LAST!

THE SERGEANT SMILED UNPLEASANTLY.

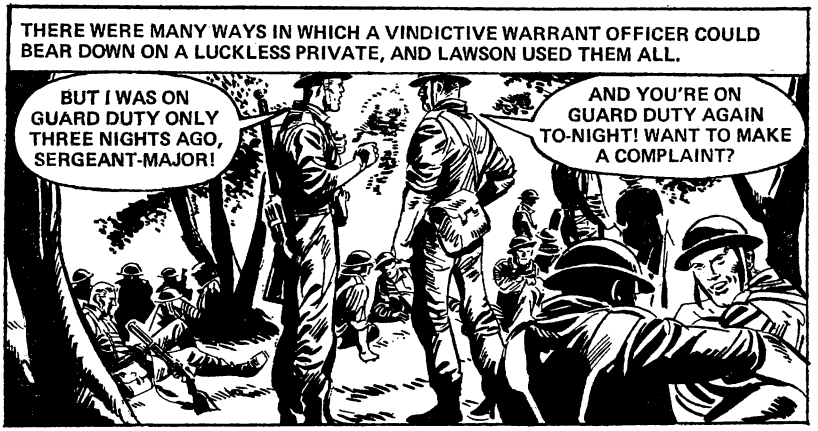
THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, RANDALL. I'M GOING TO THE SOUTH HANTS, TOO! NOW ISN'T THAT COSY?

THAT'S THE WORST NEWS I'VE HAD SINCE I JOINED THE CURSED ARMY!

WORSE WAS TO COME, FOR LAWSON WAS PROMOTED TO COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR OF 'B' COMPANY, THE COMPANY MIKE RANDALL WAS IN.
OF ALL THE FILTHY LUCK! THE ONLY WAY I'LL BE SHOT OF LAWSON IS IF I GET KILLED – OR HE DOES!

BUT WHEN THE BATTALION WENT TO ITALY, C.S.M. LAWSON SOON SHOWED THAT HE WAS NOT GOING TO TAKE ANY UNNECESSARY RISKS.
NO-ONE'S EVER GOING TO ACCUSE YOU OF BEING A GLORYHUNTER, SERGEANT-MAJOR! WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO HOLD YOUR HAND?

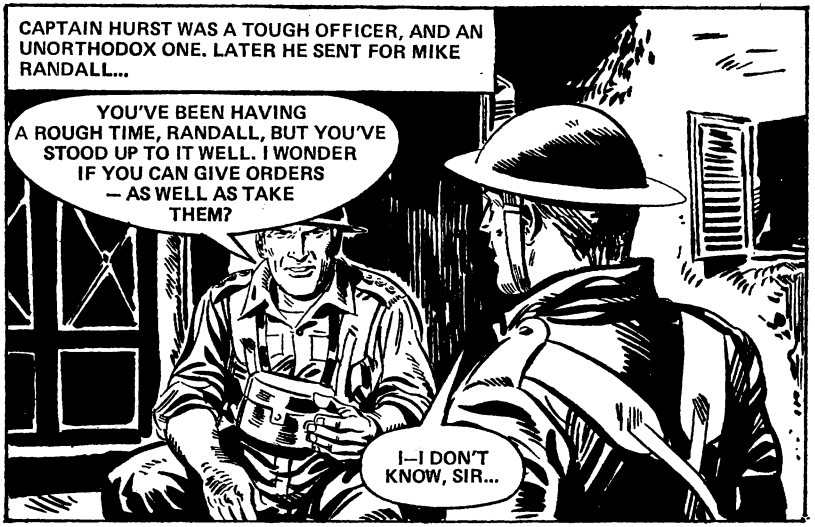
THAT INSOLENT JIBE STUNG LAWSON TO THE QUICK...
RIGHT, RANDALL – I'LL PAY YOU BACK FOR THAT, MY BUCKO!


THERE WERE MANY WAYS IN WHICH A VINDICTIVE WARRANT OFFICER COULD BEAR DOWN ON A LUCKLESS PRIVATE, AND LAWSON USED THEM ALL.
BUT I WAS ON GUARD DUTY ONLY THREE NIGHTS AGO, SERGEANT-MAJOR!
AND YOU'RE ON GUARD DUTY AGAIN TO-NIGHT! WANT TO MAKE A COMPLAINT?

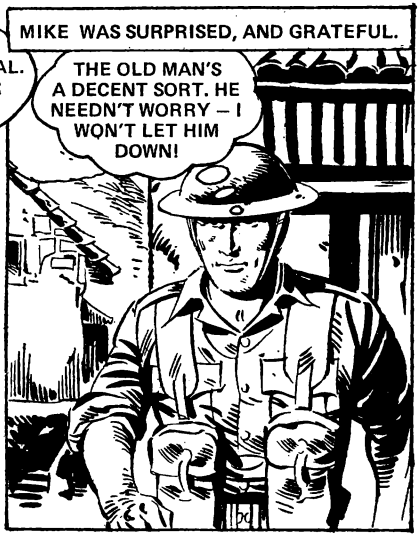
MIKE BIT BACK AN ANGRY RETORT...
ANY PRIVATE WHO MAKES AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT AGAINST A SERGEANT-MAJOR IS ASKING FOR TROUBLE! I WOULDN'T GIVE HIM THE SATISFACTION!

WHEN THEY WERE IN ACTION, IT WAS THE SAME...
GO OUT TO THE LISTENING POST AND RELIEVE PRIVATE SHAW, RANDALL! AND BE QUICK ABOUT IT!
OKAY, SERGEANT-MAJOR. SURE YOU WOULDN'T LIKE TO COME WITH ME TO SEE I DON'T WASTE TIME?

EVENTUALLY, CAPTAIN HURST, THE COMPANY COMMANDER, NOTICED WHAT WAS HAPPENING...
I KNOW RANDALL'S A DIFFICULT CHARACTER, SERGEANT-MAJOR, BUT HE'S A GOOD FIGHTING MAN AND I THINK YOU'RE BEING TOO HARD ON HIM. EASE UP, EH?
VERY GOOD, SIR!
HARD ON HIM – I HAVEN'T STARTED YET!


CAPTAIN HURST WAS A TOUGH OFFICER, AND AN UNORTHODOX ONE. LATER HE SENT FOR MIKE RANDALL...
YOU'VE BEEN HAVING A ROUGH TIME, RANDALL, BUT YOU'VE STOOD UP TO IT WELL. I WONDER IF YOU CAN GIVE ORDERS – AS WELL AS TAKE THEM?
I–I DON'T KNOW, SIR...

WE'LL SEE. I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU RESPONSIBILITY AND PROMOTE YOU TO LANCE CORPORAL. IF YOU DO WELL, YOU'LL HAVE YOUR SECOND TAPE SOON, BUT DON'T LET ME DOWN, LAD.


MIKE WAS SURPRISED, AND GRATEFUL.
THE OLD MAN'S A DECENT SORT. HE NEEDN'T WORRY – I WON'T LET HIM DOWN!

SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON, OF COURSE, RECEIVED THE NEWS WITH DISMAY AND ANGER.

TOADYING UP TO THE O.C., EH, RANDALL? DON'T FORGET THIS – AS SERGEANT-MAJOR, MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO KEEP THE N.C.O.s UP TO SCRATCH. I'LL HAVE MY EYE ON YOU!

I BET YOU WILL!

THREE WEEKS LATER, IN THE BATTALION ATTACK ON LARINO, RANDALL PROVED HIMSELF A GOOD SECTION LEADER WHEN THE PLATOON WAS HELD UP BY MACHINE GUN FIRE...

THERE'S DEAD GROUND OFF TO THE RIGHT, BOYS. WE'LL WORK OUR WAY ROUND THERE AND TAKE 'EM FROM THE REAR. BUT KEEP LOW, DON'T LET THEM SEE YOU.

OKAY, CORP! WE'RE GETTING NOWHERE SWOPPING BULLETS WITH 'EM!

OUT-FLANKED, THE ENEMY MACHINE GUNS WERE TAKEN BY STORM AND WITHOUT LOSS.

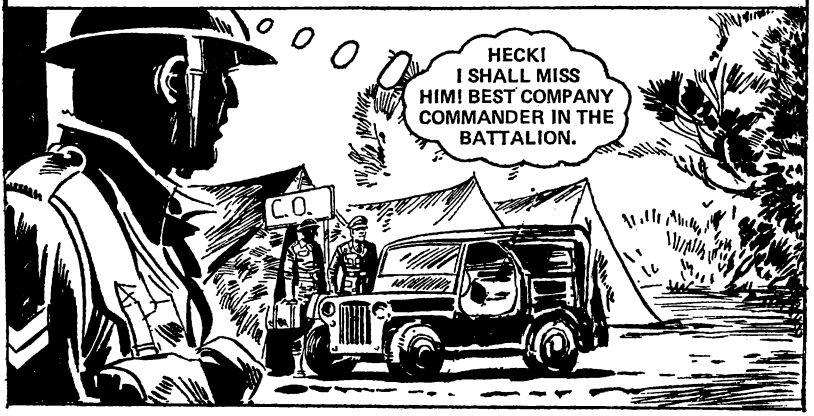
AT 'EM, LADS!

AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ACTION, MIKE RANDALL WAS SUMMONED TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COLONEL HIMSELF...

YOU USED YOUR INITIATIVE AT LARINO, RANDALL. WELL DONE! CAPTAIN HURST HAS RECOMMENDED YOU FOR PROMOTION, AND I HAVE AGREED. WITH EFFECT FROM NOW, YOU ARE A FULL CORPORAL.

THANK YOU, SIR!

A MONTH LATER, THE WHOLE DIVISION WAS SENT BACK TO ENGLAND TO TRAIN FOR THE COMING INVASION. THERE WAS SOME REORGANISATION, AND CAPTAIN HURST WAS PROMOTED TO MAJOR AND POSTED TO ANOTHER BATTALION.



ALTHOUGH IT WAS A SHOCK FOR MIKE RANDALL, IT DELIGHTED COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON.

CAPTAIN HARDING, THE NEW COMPANY COMMANDER, TENDED TO RELY HEAVILY ON THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR'S EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE.

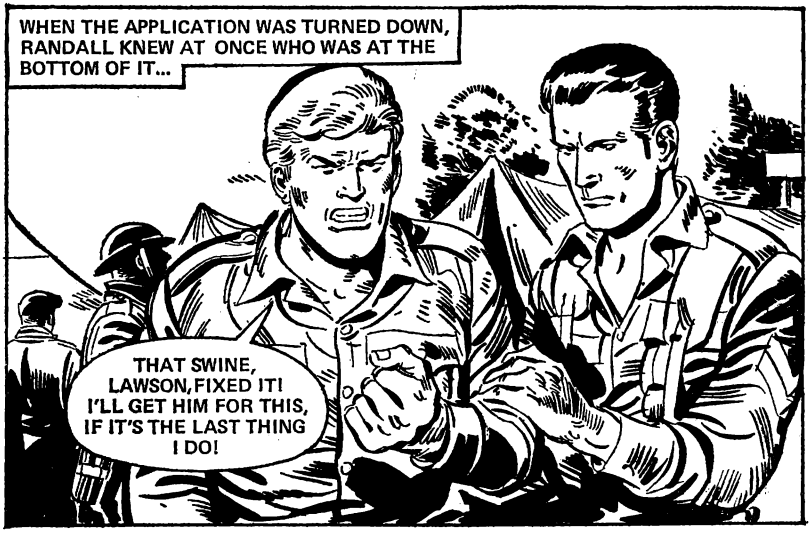
TELL ME ABOUT THE N.C.O.s IN THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR. ARE THEY A GOOD LOT?

NOT BAD, SIR, THOUGH WE'VE GOT ONE OR TWO BAD APPLES, CORPORAL RANDALL, FOR EXAMPLE – HE NEEDS WATCHING!

THAT SPRING, MIKE RANDALL'S MOTHER WAS TAKEN SERIOUSLY ILL. HE APPLIED FOR LEAVE SO THAT HE COULD VISIT HER.

THIS APPLICATION OF CORPORAL RANDALL'S FOR COMPASSIONATE LEAVE, SERGEANT-MAJOR...

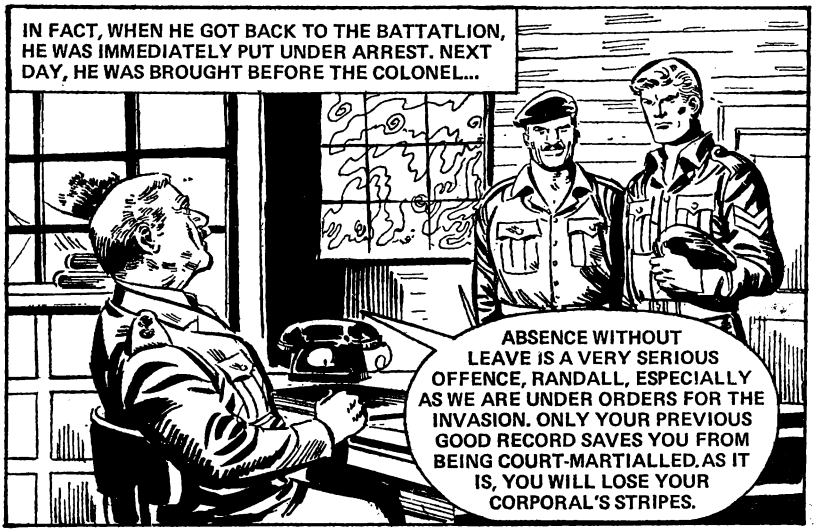
RANDALL'S A LEADSWINGER, SIR, ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO DODGE THE COLUMN. I DON'T SUPPOSE FOR A MOMENT HIS MOTHER IS AS ILL AS HE MAKES OUT.


WHEN THE APPLICATION WAS TURNED DOWN, RANDALL KNEW AT ONCE WHO WAS AT THE BOTTOM OF IT...
THAT SWINE, LAWSON, FIXED IT! I'LL GET HIM FOR THIS, IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO!

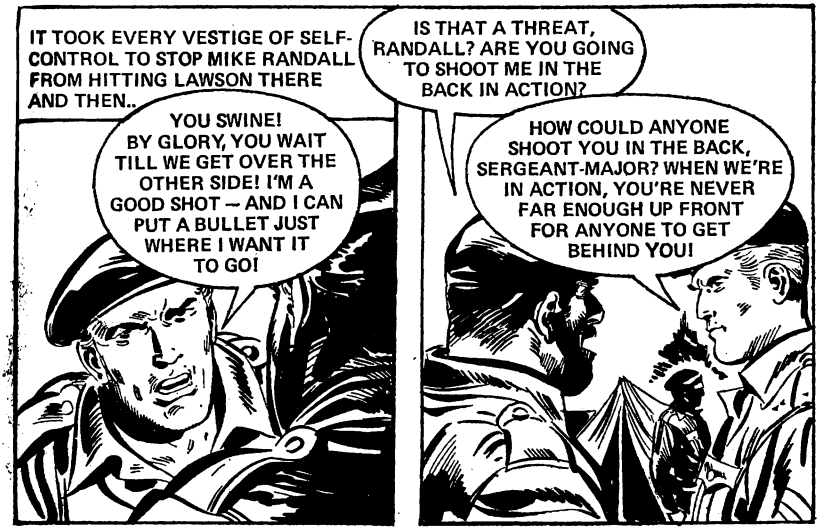
MIKE'S PAL, CORPORAL DAVE LOCK, HURRIEDLY TRIED TO QUIETEN HIM.
STEADY ON, MIKE! YOU'LL ONLY GET INTO TROUBLE WITH THAT SORT OF TALK. SERGEANT BIG-EARS SMALE IS LISTENING – AND HE AND LAWSON ARE AS THICK AS THIEVES!

WITH A RECKESS DISREGARD OF THE CONSEQUENCES, RANDALL TOOK FRENCH LEAVE AND WENT AND SAW HIS MOTHER, ANYWAY.
IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE YOU, SON! YOU KNOW I FEEL BETTER ALREADY.

THE WARD SISTER HAD A WORD WITH MIKE BEFORE HE LEFT...
COME AGAIN AS SOON AS YOU CAN! IT'S THE BEST MEDICINE YOUR MOTHER CAN HAVE.
'FRAID THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE, SISTER. I'M IN THE ARMY – AND I'M ALREADY IN TROUBLE...


IN FACT, WHEN HE GOT BACK TO THE BATTATLION, HE WAS IMMEDIATELY PUT UNDER ARREST. NEXT DAY, HE WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE COLONEL...
ABSENCE WITHOUT LEAVE IS A VERY SERIOUS OFFENCE, RANDALL, ESPECIALLY AS WE ARE UNDER ORDERS FOR THE INVASION. ONLY YOUR PREVIOUS GOOD RECORD SAVES YOU FROM BEING COURT-MARTIALLED. AS IT IS, YOU WILL LOSE YOUR CORPORAL'S STRIPES.

SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON MADE NO EFFORT TO HIDE HIS DELIGHT.
WELL, WELL, SO YOU WON'T BE GETTING YOUR SERGEANT'S STRIPES YET AWHILE, SONNY BOY? WHAT A SHAME! AND HOW'S YOUR POOR OLD MUM?
WHY, YOU – YOU –


IT TOOK EVERY VESTIGE OF SELF-CONTROL TO STOP MIKE RANDALL FROM HITTING LAWSON THERE AND THEN..
YOU SWINE! BY GLORY, YOU WAIT TILL WE GET OVER THE OTHER SIDE! I'M A GOOD SHOT – AND I CAN PUT A BULLET JUST WHERE I WANT IT TO GO!
IS THAT A THREAT, RANDALL? ARE YOU GOING TO SHOOT ME IN THE BACK IN ACTION?
HOW COULD ANYONE SHOOT YOU IN THE BACK, SERGEANT-MAJOR? WHEN WE'RE IN ACTION, YOU'RE NEVER FAR ENOUGH UP FRONT FOR ANYONE TO GET BEHIND YOU!

THE SERGEANT-MAJOR'S FACE WENT PURPLE WITH RAGE.
YOU WOULDN'T STRIKE ME, SURELY, SERGEANT-MAJOR?
NO! THERE ARE BETTER WAYS OF DEALING WITH YOU!

A WEEK LATER, THE BATTALION WAS MOVED TO ITS EMBARKATION AREA NEAR PORTSMOUTH. CAPTAIN HARDING ADDRESSED THE ASSEMBLED COMPANY...

ALL LEAVE IS CANCELLED. YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANYONE OUTSIDE THE BATTALION AREA, BY LETTER OR PHONE. DETAILED BRIEFINGS COMMENCE THIS AFTERNOON.

SOON WE SHALL BE IN FRANCE, AND IT WILL BE VERY USEFUL TO HAVE MEN WHO CAN SPEAK FRENCH FLUENTLY TO ACT AS INTERPRETERS. I WANT ANY MAN WHO CAN DO SO TO STEP FORWARD, AND SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON WILL TAKE THEIR NAMES.

RANDALL'S FATHER WAS AN ELECTRICAL ENGINEER WHO HAD ONCE WORKED FOR A FRENCH FIRM IN LE HAVRE. HIS SON HAD GONE TO A FRENCH SCHOOL FOR OVER FOUR YEARS, AND COULD SPEAK FRENCH WITHOUT THE TRACE OF AN ACCENT.

I SPEAK FRENCH FLUENTLY, SIR.

ONLY ONE EH? VERY WELL, YOU WILL BE THE COMPANY INTERPRETER, RANDALL. YOU'D BETTER HAVE SOME RANK, THOUGH. I'LL SEE THE COLONEL ABOUT GIVING YOU YOUR STRIPES BACK.

AFTER THE PARADE WAS DISMISSED...

THIS WON'T EXCUSE YOU FROM A CORPORAL'S NORMAL DUTIES, REMEMBER...

I'M SURE YOU'LL SEE TO THAT, SERGEANT-MAJOR. BUT DON'T PRESS ME TOO HARD. I'LL STILL BE CARRYING A RIFLE, REMEMBER...

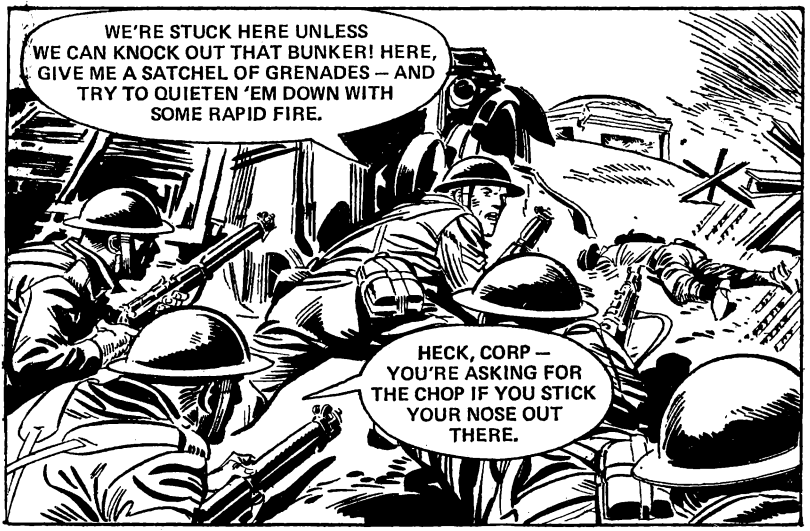
LAWSON TURNED AT ONCE TO SERGEANT SMALE...

DID YOU HEAR THAT, SERGEANT? HE THREATENED TO MURDER ME!

I HEARD!

ON D-DAY, THE SOUTH HANTS STORMED ASHORE ON THE RIGHT OF THE CANADIANS AND, IN THE CONFUSION, RANDALL LOST SIGHT OF SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON...

MURDEROUS MACHINE GUN FIRE PINNED DOWN THE PLATOON TO WHICH MIKE WAS ATTACHED – EVEN AS THEY REACHED THE BEACH.


WE'RE STUCK HERE UNLESS WE CAN KNOCK OUT THAT BUNKER! HERE, GIVE ME A SATCHEL OF GRENADES – AND TRY TO QUIETEN 'EM DOWN WITH SOME RAPID FIRE.
HECK, CORP – YOU'RE ASKING FOR THE CHOP IF YOU STICK YOUR NOSE OUT THERE.

NOW!
A BRIEF LULL AND RANDALL TOOK OFF LIKE A SCALDED CAT...

INSIDE THE GERMAN BLOCKHOUSE, THERE WAS SUDDEN ALARM...

ACHTUNG! GET THE SWINE – GET HIM!

HE – HE'S TOO CLOSE!

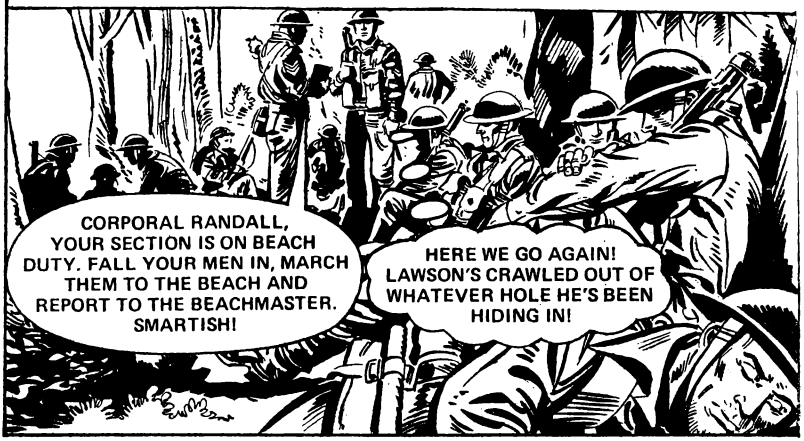
THEN...

BLITZEN–GRENADE!

AAACH!

A THUNDERCLAP EXPLOSION AND THE CLIFF-FACE SEEMED TO SHAKE AS IF IN AN EARTHQUAKE, DELUGING THE WRECKED BLOCKHOUSE AND THE BEACH IN ROCKS.

MIKE RANDALL DID NOT SEE LAWSON AT ALL UNTIL THE BATTALION WAS WITHDRAWN ON D-DAY +3 TO REST NEAR BERNIERE. THEY HAD LOST MANY MEN AND WERE BATTLE-WEARY.



LATER, AS HE AND HIS MEN HELPED UNLOAD STORES; MIKE RANDALL APOLOGISED...

Chapter 2. Death Blow

WHEN ONE OF THE OFFICERS, LIEUTENANT GIBB, WAS WOUNDED, CAPTAIN HARDING AUTOMATICALLY CALLED ON LAWSON.
TAKE TEMPORARY COMMAND OF FIVE AND SIX PLATOONS, PLEASE, SERGEANT-MAJOR, UNTIL WE GET A REPLACEMENT. ONE OF YOUR PLATOONS WILL TAKE THE POINT TOMORROW.
VERY GOOD, SIR!

THE "POINT" – THE MOST DANGEROUS POSITION IN THE ADVANCE. THE LEADING PLATOON, THE FIRST TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY, THE FIRST TO FEEL THE WAY FORWARD...
HECK! MINES!
AAGH!

THE ADVANCE HALTED AT ONCE FOR THE MINE-INFESTED GROUND BEFORE THEM WAS A DEATH TRAP. SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON BUSTLED UP...
WE CAN'T WASTE TIME. CORPORAL LOCK, TAKE YOUR SECTION FORWARD!

CORPORAL DAVE LOCK VOICED A MILD PROTEST...
SHOULDN'T WE WAIT FOR THE MINE-SWEEPING SQUAD TO CLEAR A PATH FIRST, SERGEANT-MAJOR?
I'VE TOLD YOU, WE HAVEN'T TIME FOR THAT. PRESS ON, CORPORAL! THAT'S AN ORDER!

LEADING THE WAY, CORPORAL LOCK WENT FORWARD – UNTIL...
AAGH!

A GASP OF HORROR AND FURY BURST FROM RANDALL...
DAVE! DAVE LOCK'S GONE! AND THAT RAT OF A LAWSON AS GOOD AS MURDERED HIM!

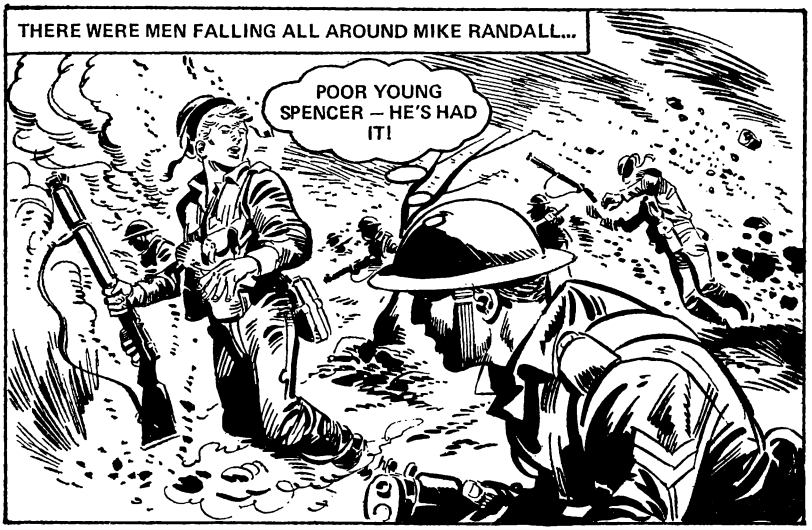
HE TURNED TO CURSE LAWSON, BUT THE SERGEANT-MAJOR WAS NO LONGER THERE...
IF I GET THE SWINE ON HIS OWN, I'LL DO FOR HIM! I SWEAR I WILL!

CAPTAIN HARDING ARRIVED ON THE SCENE THEN, AND IMMEDIATELY SENT FOR THE MINE-SWEEPING SQUAD.

NO-ONE ELSE TO GO FORWARD YET! WE'LL WAIT TILL WE CAN FOLLOW A SAFE PATH.

THAT'S THE ORDER LAWSON SHOULD HAVE GIVEN!

THE MINE-DETECTOR SQUAD SWEPT THREE PATHS THROUGH THE MINEFIELD AND THE COMPANY GOT MOVING AGAIN – ONLY TO COME UNDER A STORM OF MACHINE GUN AND MORTAR FIRE...


THERE WERE MEN FALLING ALL AROUND MIKE RANDALL...
POOR YOUNG SPENCER – HE'S HAD IT!

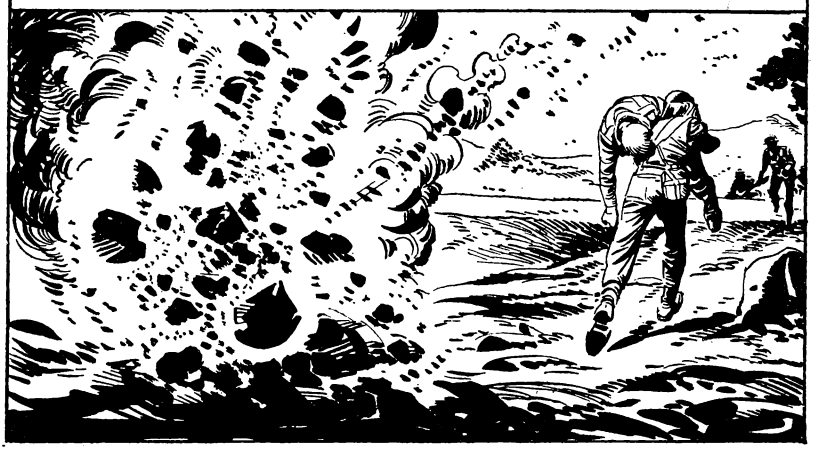
BUT THE SOUTH HANTS REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE. THE ENEMY RESISTANCE SUDDENLY CRACKED AND THEY WITHDREW UNDER COVER OF HEAVY MORTAR FIRE...

THE POSITION WAS QUICKLY CONSOLIDATED AND MIKE RANDALL'S SECTION WAS POSTED ON THE TOP FLOOR OF A SHELL-TORN HOUSE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE.

THE CORPORAL TOOK STOCK OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS, INCLUDING THE SLOPE UP WHICH THEY HAD ADVANCED. SUDDENLY HE SPOTTED MOVEMENT...

GERMAN ARTILLERY HAD BEGUN TO BOMBARD THE VILLAGE, SOME OF THE SHELLS FALLING ON THE SLOPE WHERE KEN SPENCER LAY...

RANDALL HURRIED FROM THE HOUSE AND RAN BACK TO WHERE KEN LAY. HE LIFTED THE WOUNDED YOUNGSTER ON TO HIS SHOULDER AS GENTLY AS HE COULD...



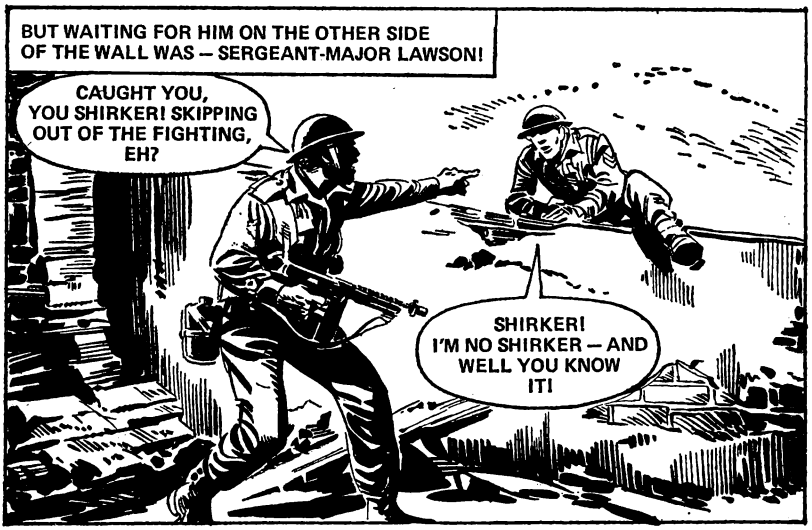
ONCE UNDER SOME SORT OF COVER, HE PUT KEN DOWN AND BOUND UP HIS WOUNDED THIGH AS BEST HE COULD.

THE CORPORAL STARTED BACK TOWARDS THE VILLAGE, BUT HAD TO DIVE FOR COVER AS A MURDEROUS BARRAGE OF SHELLS, FAR HEAVIER THAN ANYTHING THAT HAD GONE BEFORE, CRASHED DOWN CLOSE TO HIM...

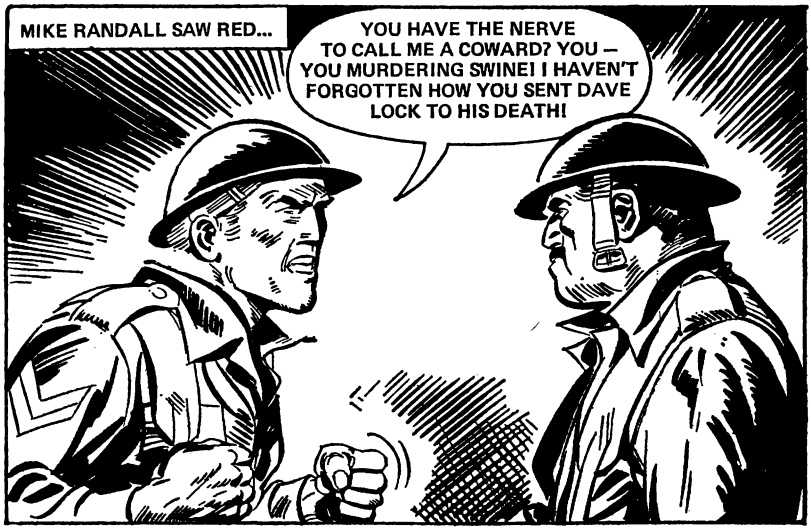
NOT A HOPE OF GETTING THROUGH THATI I'LL HAVE TO WAIT OR DETOUR ROUND IT.

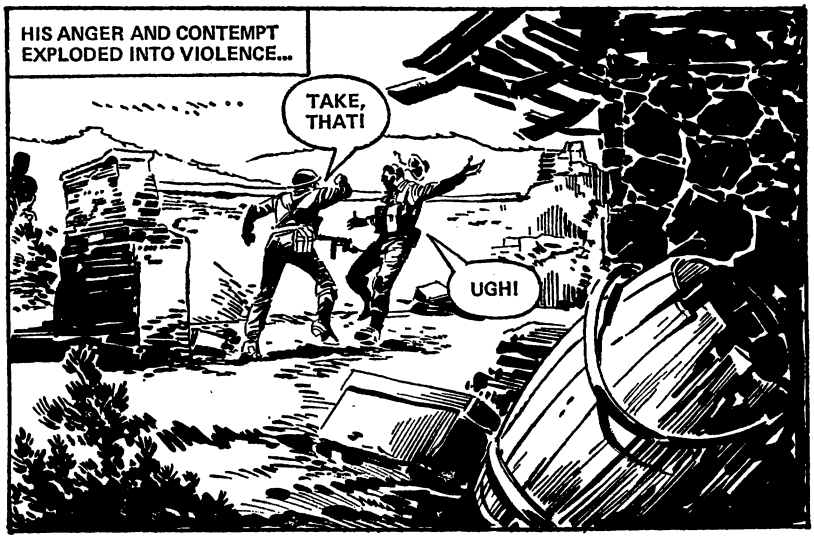
THE SHELLING KEPT ON AND ON, HOWEVER, FOR IT WAS OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO STOP REINFORCEMENTS GETTING TO THE FORWARD POSITIONS. RANDALL DECIDED TO TRY TO FIND A WAY ROUND IT...

SEEM TO BE IN THE CLEAR NOW! I'D BEST GET OVER THE WALL AND WORK MY WAY ROUND TO THE LEFT...


BUT WAITING FOR HIM ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL WAS – SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON!
CAUGHT YOU, YOU SHIRKER! SKIPPING OUT OF THE FIGHTING, EH?
SHIRKER! I'M NO SHIRKER – AND WELL YOU KNOW IT!

LAWSON'S COLD EYES GLEAMED...
COWARDICE IN THE FACE OF THE ENEMY, THAT'S WHAT THE CHARGE'LL BE! ALL I'VE GOT TO DO IS CALL THOSE MILITARY POLICE OVER – AND YOU'RE IN TROUBLE RIGHT UP TO YOUR NECK, RANDALL! I'VE GOT YOU JUST WHERE I WANT YOU AT LAST!


MIKE RANDALL SAW RED...
YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO CALL ME A COWARD? YOU – YOU MURDERING SWINE! I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HOW YOU SENT DAVE LOCK TO HIS DEATH!


HIS ANGER AND CONTEMPT EXPLODED INTO VIOLENCE...
TAKE, THAT!
UGH!

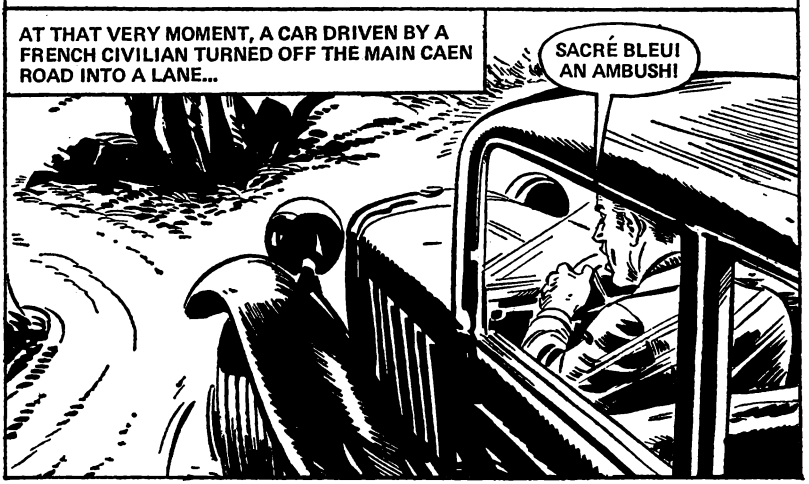
AS LAWSON STAGGERED BACK, RANDALL STEPPED CLOSER AND HIT HIM AGAIN.

LAWSON'S HEAD HIT THE WALL AND HE SLUMPED TO THE GROUND. MIKE KNELT BY THE SERGEANT-MAJOR AND FELT FOR HIS PULSE. BUT THERE WAS NONE!

SEVERAL MEN HAD HEARD HIM THREATEN TO KILL SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON – AND NOW HE HAD DONE IT!
HECK! THAT REDCAP MUST HAVE SEEN ME HIT HIM...

PANIC SEIZED MIKE RANDALL THEN. HE TURNED AND RAN...
THEY'LL NEVER BELIEVE I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT!

Chapter 3. Sitting Target



FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, RANDALL, THE FUGITIVE, CAME UPON THE CAR AND THE DEAD DRIVER.

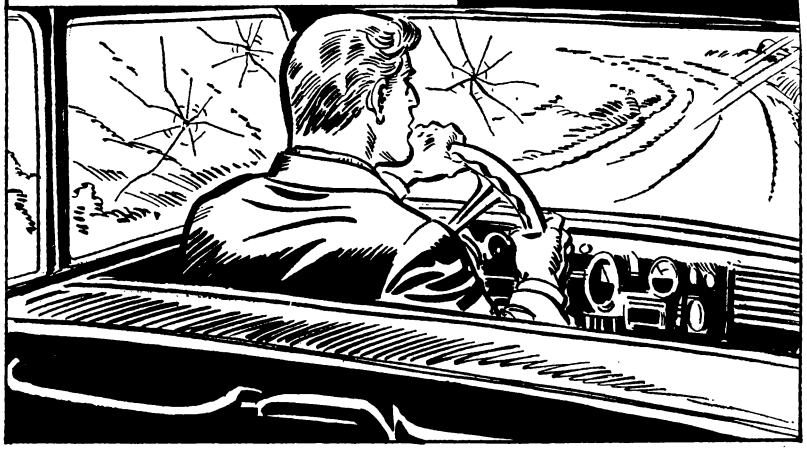
POOR DEVIL! HE MUST HAVE BEEN HIT BY STRAY BULLETS – OR BY GERMAN SNIPERS!

HE TOOK A QUICK LOOK AT THE FRENCHMAN'S PAPERS. AMONGST THEM WAS THE DOCUMENT ISSUED BY THE GERMANS TO FRENCH WORKERS...

ARISTIDE DUVAL. HEY, THIS COULD BE MY CHANCE. I SPEAK FRENCH WELL ENOUGH TO PASS AS A FROGGIE...

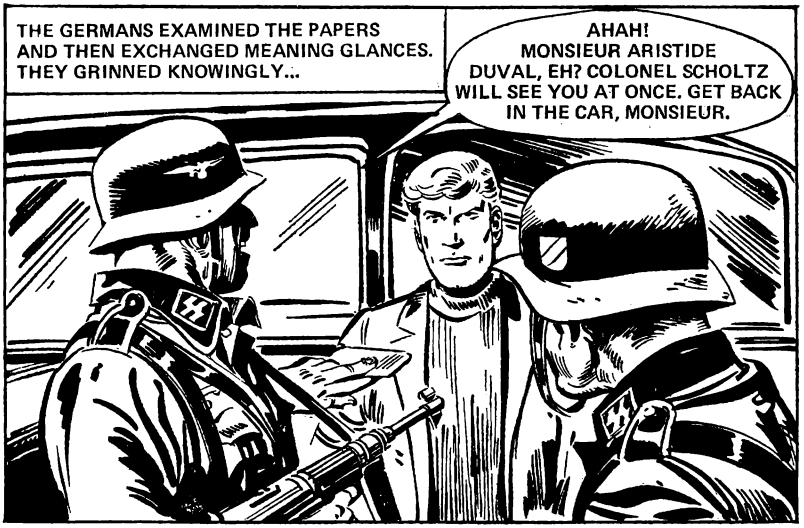
IF I COULD ONLY LOSE MYSELF AMONGST THE FRENCH POPULATION. WITH ANY LUCK, THEY MIGHT EVEN TAKE THAT BODY AS BEING MINE. I'LL LEAVE MY PAYBOOK IN THE BATTLE DRESS.

HE STARTED THE CAR AND DROVE ON. HE SEEMED TO BE LEAVING THE SOUNDS OF THE GUNS BEHIND HIM.

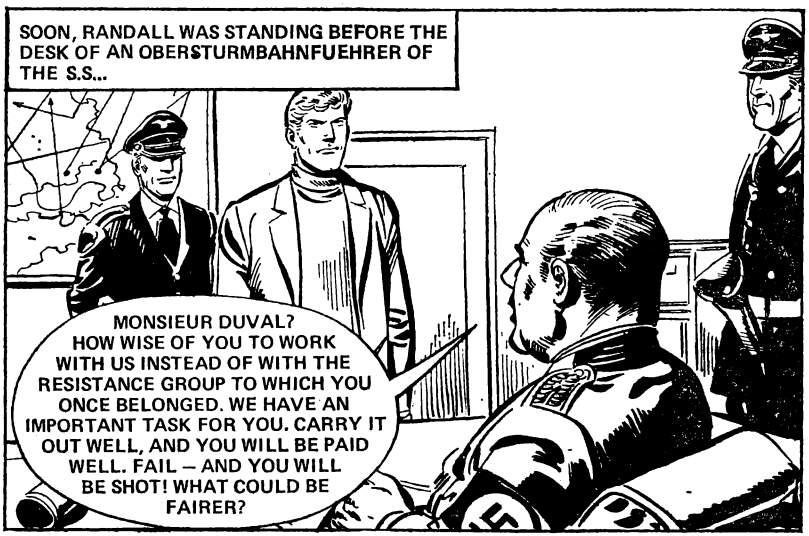


HE ROUNDED A BEND – AND THERE WERE TWO GERMAN SOLDIERS STANDING IN HIS PATH.

HANDALL STOPPED, AND GOT OUT OF THE CAR. ONE OF THE GERMANS SPOKE TO HIM IN POOR FRENCH...
YOUR PAPERS!


THE GERMANS EXAMINED THE PAPERS AND THEN EXCHANGED MEANING GLANCES. THEY GRINNED KNOWINGLY...
AHAH! MONSIEUR ARISTIDE DUVAL, EH? COLONEL SCHOLTZ WILL SEE YOU AT ONCE. GET BACK IN THE CAR, MONSIEUR.

ONE OF THE GERMANS GOT IN BESIDE HIM AND DIRECTED HIM ALONG THE LANE AND INTO A LARGE VILLAGE.
THIS WAY, MONSIEUR...

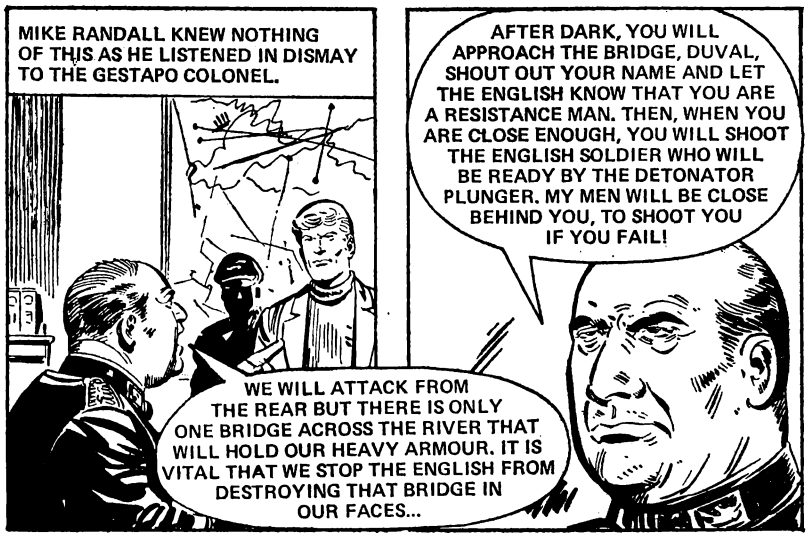

SOON, RANDALL WAS STANDING BEFORE THE DESK OF AN OBERSTURMBAHNFUEHRER OF THE S.S...
MONSIEUR DUVAL? HOW WISE OF YOU TO WORK WITH US INSTEAD OF WITH THE RESISTANCE GROUP TO WHICH YOU ONCE BELONGED. WE HAVE AN IMPORTANT TASK FOR YOU. CARRY IT OUT WELL, AND YOU WILL BE PAID WELL. FAIL – AND YOU WILL BE SHOT! WHAT COULD BE FAIRER?

WITH GROWING HORROR MIKE REALISED HE HAD TAKEN ON THE IDENTITY OF A TRAITOR!

AN ENGLISH PARACHUTE BATTALION IS HOLDING MONTPELIER AGAINST ALL OUR ASSAULTS. WITH YOUR HELP, HOWEVER, WE WILL BREAK THEM AND TAKE THE TOWN!

THE VILLAGE OF MONTPELIER STOOD ON A HILL THAT COMMANDED THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN. TWO DAYS BEFORE, A BATTALION OF THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT CAPTURED IT WITH THE HELP OF THE LOCAL RESISTANCE. SINCE THEN, THEY HAD BEEN UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK.

COLONEL PARRISH OF THE PARAS ISSUED A TOUGH OPERATIONAL ORDER...
THERE WILL BE NO RETIREMENT AND NO SURRENDER. WE WILL HOLD MONTPELIER, WHATEVER THE COST, UNTIL OUR ARMOUR REACHES US. MAKE SURE EVERY MAN UNDERSTANDS THAT GENTLEMEN
YESSIR!


MIKE RANDALL KNEW NOTHING OF THIS AS HE LISTENED IN DISMAY TO THE GESTAPO COLONEL.
AFTER DARK, YOU WILL APPROACH THE BRIDGE, DUVAL, SHOUT OUT YOUR NAME AND LET THE ENGLISH KNOW THAT YOU ARE A RESISTANCE MAN. THEN, WHEN YOU ARE CLOSE ENOUGH, YOU WILL SHOOT THE ENGLISH SOLDIER WHO WILL BE READY BY THE DETONATOR PLUNGER. MY MEN WILL BE CLOSE BEHIND YOU, TO SHOOT YOU IF YOU FAIL!
WE WILL ATTACK FROM THE REAR BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE BRIDGE ACROSS THE RIVER THAT WILL HOLD OUR HEAVY ARMOUR. IT IS VITAL THAT WE STOP THE ENGLISH FROM DESTROYING THAT BRIDGE IN OUR FACES...

THAT NIGHT, RANDALL WAS GIVEN A PISTOL AND DRIVEN TO A SPOT LESS THAN HALF A MILE FROM THE BRIDGE. GERMAN ARMOUR STOOD WAITING AMONG THE TREES AS TWO S.S. MEN ORDERED HIM FORWARD...

WE WILL BE WITHIN SHOOTING DISTANCE OF YOU ALL THE TIME, MONSIEUR FRENCHMAN — AND WE WILL NOT MISS!

IN THE SHADOWY MOONLIGHT HE WALKED FORWARD, HIS MIND IN A TURMOIL.

I CAN'T HELP THE JERRIES GET ACROSS THE BRIDGE — I JUST CAN'T! I'VE GOT TO WARN THE PARAS!

AS HE APPROACHED THE BRIDGE, A CHALLENGE RANG OUT FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF IT.

HALT! WHO GOES THERE?

I AM ARISTIDE DUVAL, RESISTANCE LEADER. LET ME THROUGH, PLEASE...

HE MOVED SLOWLY CLOSER – AND THE PARAS DID NOT SHOOT FOR THEY HAD WELCOMED OTHER RESISTANCE MEN INTO MONTPELIER. BUT SUDDENLY, SHOUTING A WARNING, RANDALL BROKE INTO A RUN...

BLOW THE BRIDGE! BLOW THE BRIDGE! THE PANZERS ARE COMING!

THE TWO S.S. MEN IMMEDIATELY OPENED FIRE, BUT MIKE THREW HIMSELF FLAT. INSTEAD, THEIR BULLETS KILLED THE PARATROOPER WHO WAS STANDING BY THE PLUNGER.

AAGHI

ENGINES THUNDERING, PANZERS WERE ALREADY RACING TOWARDS THE BRIDGE, THEIR MACHINE GUNS HAMMERING...

THE FIRST PANZER GROUND TO A HALT AND ONE MAN JUMPED DOWN TO SEVER THE CABLE LEADING TO THE DEMOLITION CHARGES...

SCHNELL -- SCHNELLI WE ARE A SITTING TARGET HERE!

NEXT MOMENT, A PIAT SHELL FROM THE PARAS HIT THE PANZER AND IT BURST INTO FLAME...

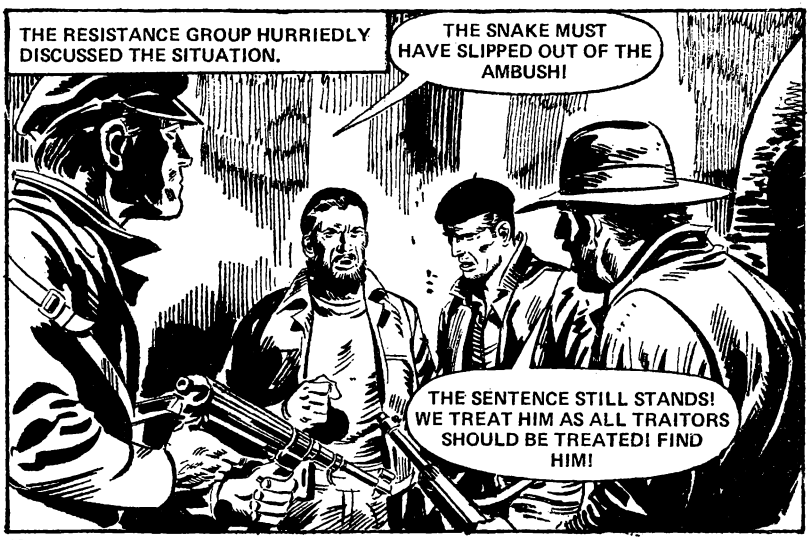
ACH! GET OUT, KAMERADEN!

BY THIS TIME, MIKE RANDALL HAD PICKED HIMSELF UP, SCARCELY ABLE TO BELIEVE THAT HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

NOW, THE OTHER PANZERS BEGAN TO USE THEIR BIG GUNS AND ONE SHELL BURST CLOSE TO HIM. BATTERED AND DAZED, RANDALL STAGGERED TOWARDS THE VILLAGE.

Chapter 4. Firing Squad

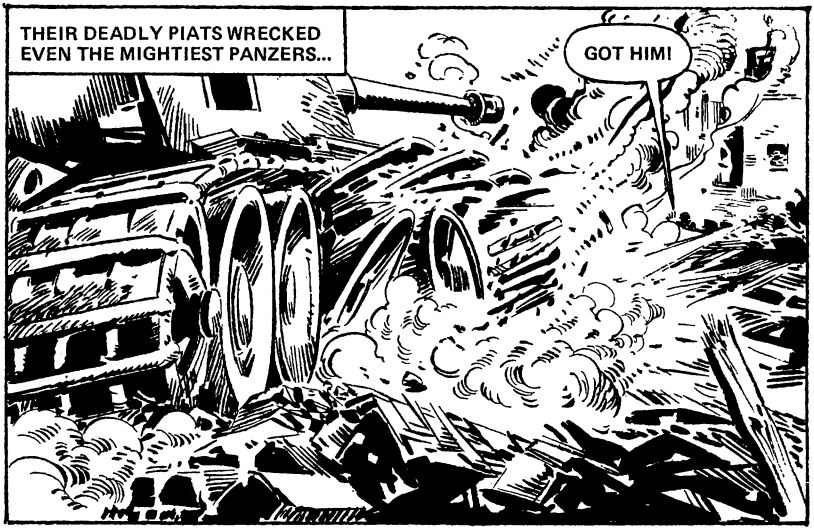
MEANWHILE, A BOY HAD HEARD THE NAME, ARISTIDE DUVAL, WHICH MIKE HAD SHOUTED TO THE PARAS. HE RAN AT ONCE TO THE NEAREST RESISTANCE POST...



RANDALL, STUMBLING BLINDLY THROUGH MONTPELIER, SUDDENLY FOUND HIMSELF SEIZED BY TWO ARMED FRENCHMEN, WHO SEEMED OBLIVIOUS TO THE BATTLE RAGING ALL AROUND THEM...

TREACHEROUS PIG – DOG! COME WITH US!

THE LEADING PANZERS, BACKED UP BY PANZER GRENADIERS, HAD WON A FOOTING IN THE VILLAGE. BUT THE PARATROOPS FOUGHT THEM EVERY INCH OF THE WAY...


THEIR DEADLY PIATS WRECKED EVEN THE MIGHTIEST PANZERS...
GOT HIM!

...AND THE PANZER GRENADIERS FOLLOWING THE ARMOUR WERE HARRIED FROM EVERY HOLE AND VANTAGE POINT.

SCARCELY REALISING WHAT WAS HAPPENING, MIKE RANDALL HAD BEEN DRAGGED INTO THE YARD AT THE BACK OF A HOUSE AND FLUNG DOWN AGAINST A WALL.

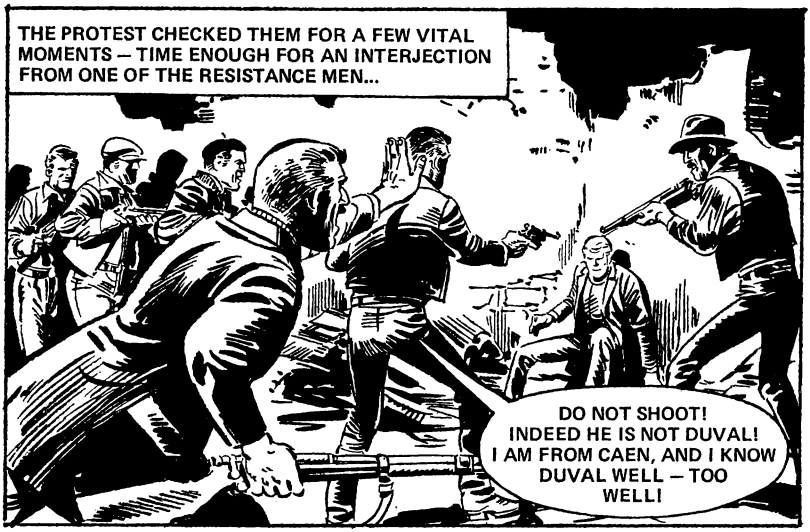
ARISTIDE DUVAL, HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO SAY WHY YOU SHOULD NOT BE SHOT FOR THE MURDEROUS TRAITOR YOU ARE?

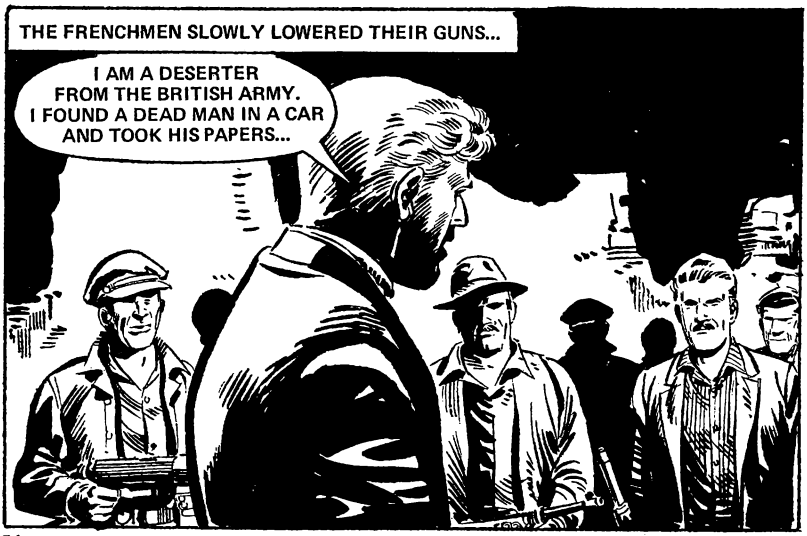
SLOWLY RECOVERING HIS WITS, RANDALL STARED IN HORROR AT THE FRENCHMEN BEFORE HIM...

TH-THEY'RE GOING TO SHOOT ME!

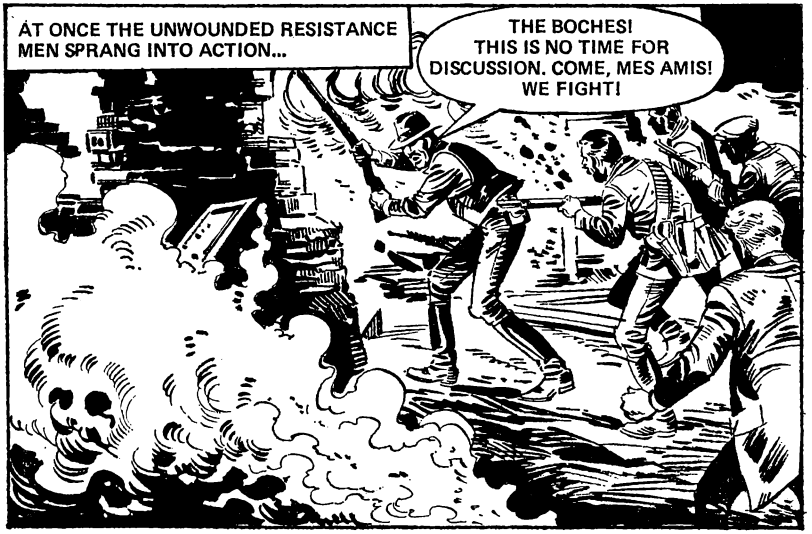
HE STARED INTO THEIR GUN MUZZLES AND GAVE A DESPAIRING, PROTESTING SHOUT...

I'M NOT ARISTIDE DUVAL! I'M AN ENGLISHMAN!


THE PROTEST CHECKED THEM FOR A FEW VITAL MOMENTS – TIME ENOUGH FOR AN INTERJECTION FROM ONE OF THE RESISTANCE MEN...
DO NOT SHOOT! INDEED HE IS NOT DUVAL! I AM FROM CAEN, AND I KNOW DUVAL WELL – TOO WELL!


THE FRENCHMEN SLOWLY LOWERED THEIR GUNS...
I AM A DESERTER FROM THE BRITISH ARMY. I FOUND A DEAD MAN IN A CAR AND TOOK HIS PAPERS...

AT THAT MOMENT, A SHELL FROM ONE OF THE GERMAN TANKS SMASHED THROUGH THE CRUMBLING WALL, KILLING ONE RESISTANCE MAN AND WOUNDING ANOTHER.
AAGH!


AT ONCE THE UNWOUNDED RESISTANCE MEN SPRANG INTO ACTION...
THE BOCHES! THIS IS NO TIME FOR DISCUSSION. COME, MES AMIS! WE FIGHT!

RANDALL WAS A DESERTER, BUT ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS THE VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND HIS OWN UNGOVERNABLE TEMPER. HE WAS ALSO A BORN FIGHTER.

HECK! I'M NOT BEING LEFT OUT OF THIS SCRAP!

HE JOINED THE FRENCH RESISTANCE AS THEY FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE SOLDIERS OF THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT.

PICK OFF THE JERRY INFANTRY. NO USE SHOOTING AT TANKS WITH STENS AND RIFLES!

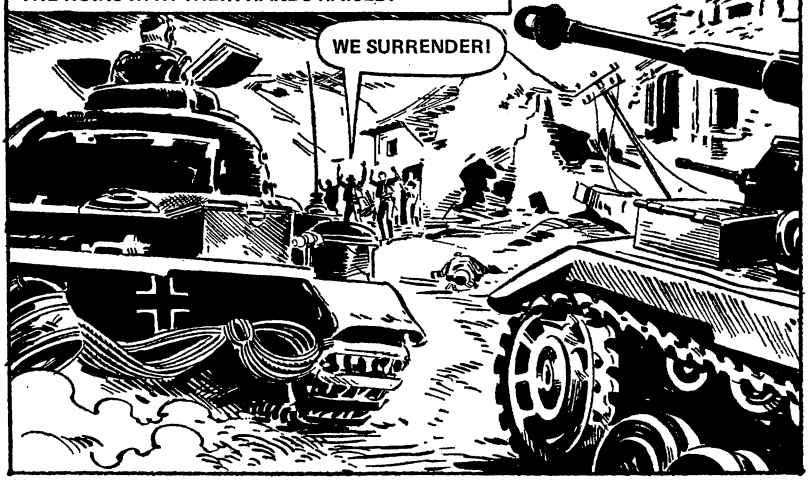
ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIVER, THE GERMAN COMMANDER WAS FUMING AT THE DELAY.

ACH! THERE IS ONLY A HANDFUL OF THE BRITISH THERE! POUR IN MORE REINFORCEMENTS, SCHONBERG – OBLITERATE THEM! WE MUST REGAIN MONTPELIER BEFORE THEIR ARMOUR REACHES IT!

ALREADY ANOTHER PANZER FORMATION WAS THUNDERING UP FROM THE SOUTH, SOON TO GO CLATTERING ACROSS THE BRIDGE.

THIS NEW AND FORMIDABLE REINFORCEMENT BROKE THROUGH THE BRITISH DEFENCES AND CUT IN BEHIND THE RESISTANCE MEN AND THE HANDFUL OF PARAS HOLDING THE POSITION ON THE OUTSKIRTS. THE FRENCHMEN SAW THAT THEIR SITUATION WAS HOPELESS...

RELUCTANTLY, THE FRENCHMEN EMERGED FROM THE RUINS WITH THEIR HANDS RAISED.



RANDALL STILL CROUCHED IN HIDING AS AN S.S. OFFICER CLIMBED DOWN FROM HIS PANZER TURRET.

YOU ARE CIVILIANS, BEARING ARMS. THAT IS AGAINST THE RULES OF WAR — AND MUST BE PUNISHED ACCORDINGLY.

WITH ICY DELIBERATION, HE SHOT TWO OF THE FRENCHMEN DEAD.

AAGHI

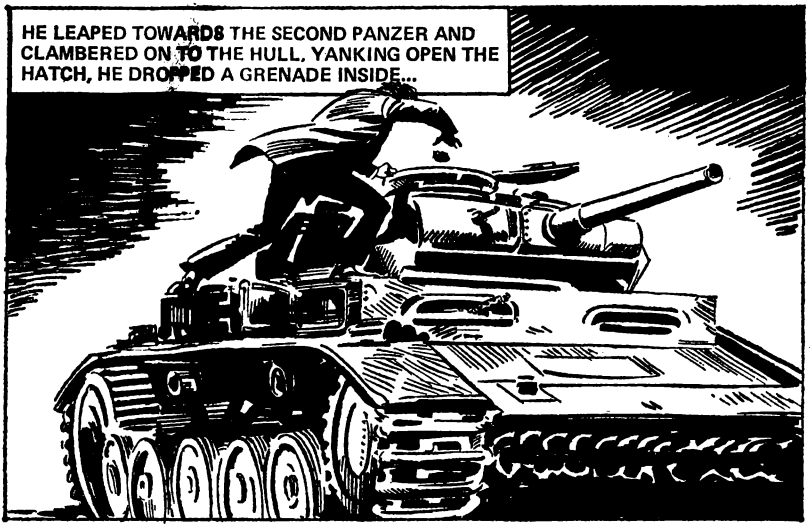
BLIND, MANIACAL RAGE SEIZED MIKE RANDALL. THE SAVAGE TEMPER THAT HAD BROUGHT HIM TROUBLE ALL HIS LIFE WAS NOW TURNED ON THE ENEMY.

MURDERERS! COLD-BLOODED MURDERERS!

HE RAMMED ANOTHER ROUND INTO THE BREECH AND SHOT A SECOND GERMAN WHO WAS TRYING TO GET OUT OF THE TURRET.

AACHI

ANOTHER TANKMAN MANAGED TO GET OUT OF THE SIDE EXIT, BUT RANDALL SWUNG HIS RIFLE LIKE A CLUB...


HE LEAPED TOWARDS THE SECOND PANZER AND CLAMBERED ON TO THE HULL, YANKING OPEN THE HATCH, HE DROPPED A GRENADE INSIDE...

BUT STANDING ON THE HULL, HE MADE A PERFECT TARGET. A BURST OF MACHINE GUN FIRE LASHED AT HIM...
UUUGH!

MORTALLY WOUNDED, HE TOPPLED TO THE GROUND—CLOSE TO A FULLY-LOADED PIAT DROPPED BY A NOW-DEAD PARATROOPER.

NOT – NOT FINISHED – YET!

ONLY THE FIERCE DRIVING FORCE OF HIS RAGE ENABLED HIM TO REACH THE ANTI-TANK WEAPON AND RAISE IT TO THE FIRING POSITION...

AT THAT CLOSE RANGE, THE PIAT PUNCHED A HOLE EVEN IN THE THICKEST ARMOUR — AND THE PANZER'S AMMUNITION EXPLODED.

STALLED BY THIS LAST ONE-MAN POCKET OF RESISTANCE, THE GERMAN ARMOUR WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE BRITISH TANKS AS THEY ROARED INTO THE VILLAGE.

IT WAS MUCH LATER WHEN THE BODY OF CORPORAL MIKE RANDALL – ALIAS 'ARISTIDE DUVAL' – WAS HANDED OVER TO THE SOUTH HANTS. THE FRENCH RESISTANCE IN THE MEANWHILE, HAD MADE SURE THAT THE STORY OF HIS LAST GALLANT ACTION WAS MADE KNOWN TO BRITISH ARMY AUTHORITIES. THE COLONEL AND THE ADJUTANT DISCUSSED THE WHOLE AFFAIR...

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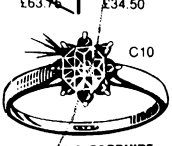

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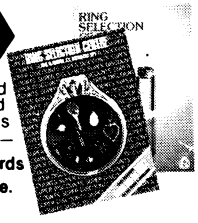

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